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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in the Atlanta, Georgia, metropolitan area to determine emergency medical services (EMS) employer needs for persons with basic emergency medical technician (EMT) skills and higher paramedic skills. Information was gathered through a telephone survey to which 24 (60 percent) of the 40 EMS employers in the area responded. The survey found that the average employer employed 42 EMTs. Sixty-two percent of the employers had no plans to expand the number of basic EMTs they hire, and all the employers turn down many qualified applicants every year. Employers appear to have a higher employment demand for paramedics, although only 58 percent reported a need for more applicants. Based on the responses to the survey, the following recommendations were made: (1) limit basic EMT certification to a 2-year period, with enrollment in a paramedic program being a requirement for certificate renewal; (2) increase disclosures about limited employment opportunities to students who enroll in basic EMT training; (3) limit basic EMT class starts; and (4) offer day and night courses that can be applied to a paramedic program diploma. (The survey instrument is included in the report.) (KC)

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THE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES SURVEY

OF

METRO ATLANTA EMPLOYERS

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THE EMS SURVEY OF METRO ATLANTA EMPLOYERS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the needs of Emergency Medical Service employers in greater metro Atlanta. Emergency Medical Services is a vital link in efforts to provide improved health care in the community. In Georgia the training required for this field is offered in several technical institutes. DeKalb Technical Institute, Gwinnet Technical Institute, and Lanier Technical Institute offer this training in greater metro Atlanta.

The field of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) began 30 years ago with the first educational curriculum being widely accepted some five years later. Presently, there are some 38 levels of EMS training with two levels established in Georgia's technical institutes. The levels are: (1) training for Basic Emergency Medical Technicians and (2) training for Paramedics. The training variety reflects differing levels of physician involvement, population, and unique circumstances. For example, in Florida 95 percent of EMS providers are paid and nationally 75 percent of EMS care is given by volunteers.

EMS remains a tricky career path and it typically offers little upward movement. Most people in the pre-hospital industry contend that EMS is in need of a status upgrade and some are convinced that it must acquire the trappings of a profession. However, nearly all agree that the needs of EMS employers must be consistently assessed in order to assure that educational institutions are providing the appropriate training. These and

other related concerns identified by the EMS staffs of DeKalb Tech, Gwinnett Tech, and Lanier Tech were behind the thrust of this study. The three institutions were specifically concerned about the employer needs for: (1) the Basic Emergency Medical Technician course and (2) the Emergency Medical Technology - Paramedic Program.

The Basic Emergency Medical Technician course at DeKalb Tech, Gwinnett Tech, and Lanier Tech is designed for students planning to work at the basic level in EMS. The course generates 23 continuing education units, it is taught four hours per evening twice a week, it has 260 contact hours of instruction, and it can be completed in two and one-half quarters. Beginning classes for the course are usually started every quarter, and students who complete the requirements receive a certificate as a qualified Emergency Medical Technician. The course represents the first phase of training in the EMS career field.

The Emergency Medical Technology - Paramedic Program is also offered at the three technical institutes. It is a more advanced study in the EMS field, it is a 60 credit hour diploma program of three or four quarters, and it has 800 contact hours of instruction. The Program consists of 11 courses and students can enroll every third quarter at DeKalb Tech and every Fall quarter at Lanier Tech and Gwinnett Tech. Students who complete the requirements receive a diploma as a qualified Paramedic.

Statement of the Problem

The training difference between the Basic Emergency Medical Technician course (Basic EMT) and the Emergency Medical Technology - Paramedic Program is duly noted by employers and those who work in the EMS field. A large number of persons are attracted to and do complete the course in Basic EMT, but a much smaller number complete the Paramedic Program. Consequently, in 1992 there appeared to be a large number of persons in the job market with Basic EMT skills while there appeared to be a considerably smaller number of persons in the job market with Paramedic skills. Many in the EMS field contend that there is a higher employment demand for persons with Paramedic skills.

These conditions were summarily addressed at the March 20, 1992 meeting of DeKalb Tech's EMS Program Advisory Committee. Some members of the Committee stressed the point that the job market is saturated with persons having only Basic EMT skills, and others felt that DeKalb Tech should produce more graduates with Paramedic skills. The Committee concluded that EMS employers should be surveyed regarding the need for persons with Basic EMT skills. Accordingly, a request to conduct the survey was made to Dekalb Tech's Office of Planning and Development on April 21, 1992. When it was duly approved by the President, Gwinnett Tech and Lanier Tech were invited to join the survey. They accepted and the study began on July 28, 1992.

Purpose

The purpose of The Emergency Medical Services Survey was to

investigate the greater metro Atlanta employer need for persons with Basic EMT skills and Paramedic skills. The basic question was: **What are the needs of emergency medical service employers in greater metro Atlanta as they relate to the employment of Emergency Medical Technicians and Emergency Medical Paramedics?**

Methodology

The survey identified EMS employers in greater metro Atlanta who could respond to a telephone questionnaire. It was estimated that the area contained no more than 40 employers. The questionnaire was developed by DeKalb Tech's Office of Planning and Development and validated by a Panel of Experts from DeKalb Tech, Gwinnett Tech, and Lanier Tech. It was proposed that the full-time EMS Instructors from the three institutions be assigned to administer the questionnaire. Because of the small population, efforts were made to obtain a sample of at least 90 percent. However, concerted efforts made by the EMS staffs at the three institutions produced only 24 (60 percent) usable responses. The data was compiled and analyzed by the Office of Planning and Development.

Analysis of Data

The 24 usable responses returned in this study was less than that anticipated because several employers list themselves as more than one company in the yellow pages, thereby giving the illusion that there are several more EMS providers in greater metro Atlanta. Also, the interviewers had some difficulty in identifying and isolating the most appropriate person to interview in each company.

The number of responses were generated as follows:

DeKalb Tech - 13

Lanier Tech - 8

Gwinnett Tech - 3

FIGURE 1. Number Of Basic EMTs Employed

41 - Average reported per employer
426 - Highest reported by an employer
5 - Lowest reported by an employer
N = 24

Employers were asked how many Basic EMTs they presently employ. The average response was 41. The responses ranged from five at one employer to 426 at another.

FIGURE 2. Employers Planning To Expand Basic EMT Positions

9 - Employers planning to expand
15 - Employers not planning to expand
N = 24

Employers were asked if they planned to expand the number of persons they hire as Basic EMTs. Nine (38 percent) employers responded yes but 15 (62 percent) reported no.

FIGURE 3. Employers Turning Away Basic EMT Applicants

21 - Employers who have turned away Basic EMT applicants
3 - Employers who have not turned away Basic EMT applicants
N = 24

Employers were asked if they turn away any persons applying for Basic EMT positions. 21 (88 percent) employers responded yes and three (12 percent) reported no. Employers reported that they each turn away an average of 178 Basic EMT applicants per year. The highest number of applicants turned away was 1,100 per year by one employer.

FIGURE 4. Number Of Basic EMT Applications

24 - Employers reporting the number to be sufficient
0 - Employers reporting the number to be insufficient
N = 24

Employers were asked if there is a sufficient number of qualified applicants for Basic EMT positions. All employers (100 percent) responded yes.

FIGURE 5. Number Of Paramedics Employed

25 - Average reported per employer
121 - Highest reported by an employer
1 - Lowest reported by an employer

Employers were asked how many Paramedics they presently employ. The average response was 25. The responses ranged from one (1) at one employer to 121 at another.

FIGURE 6. Number Of Paramedic Applications

14 - Employers reporting the number to be sufficient
10 - Employers reporting the number to be insufficient
N = 24

Employers were asked if there is a sufficient number of qualified applicants for Paramedic positions. 14 (58 percent) responded yes and 10 (42 percent) responded no.

Only 10 respondents chose to provide recommendations for EMS at the three technical institutes. Three respondents contend that Basic EMT students should be informed about the current lack of jobs and low starting salaries in the field. Two other respondents advocated increasing the number of Paramedics who can qualify for employment. The remaining five recommendations were as follows:

1. Provide more flexible class scheduling for Basic EMTs and Paramedics.
2. Limit Basic EMT certification for a two year period with enrollment into a Paramedic Program being a requirement for certificate renewal.
3. Require Basic EMTs to have street experience before entering Paramedic training.
4. Require driver accreditation to stimulate Basic EMT employment.
5. Install a part-time Paramedic Program at DeKalb Tech.

Conclusions

Employers in greater metro Atlanta agree that there is a sufficient number of Basic EMTs in the field. It appears that there is no great need for more Basic EMTs to enter the EMS job market. Normal turn-over in personnel suggests that some prudence should be used in decisions to curtail Basic EMT training in the technical institutes. However, since 62 percent of the employers do not plan to expand their number of Basic EMTs, they each turn away an average of 179 Basic EMT applicants per year, and 88 percent regularly turn down Basic EMT applications, some restrictions in Basic EMT training may be justified. Restrictions may even be an advantage for students planning to pursue an EMS career.

Employers in greater metro Atlanta appear to have a higher employment demand for Paramedics, although only 58 percent reported

a need for more applications. It appears that this need could be met with current Paramedic matriculation rates in the three technical institutes. However, the EMS field would be greatly served by better articulation between Basic EMT training and Paramedic training.

Based upon the responses made in this study the following recommendations are hereby submitted:

1. Limit Basic EMT certification for a two year period, with enrollment into a Paramedic Program being a requirement for certifcate renewal.
2. Increase disclosures about limited employment opportunities to students who enroll in Basic EMT training.
3. Limit the Basic EMT class starts to twice per year.
4. Offer courses day and night which can be applied to a Paramedic Program diploma.
5. Share copies of this study with agencies which can help to initiate constructive change in the EMS field.

THE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES EMPLOYER TELEPHONE SURVEY

Interviewer: _____ **Date of Interview:** _____

Name of Employer: _____ **Interviewee:** _____

1. How many basic Emergency Medical Technicians do you presently employ? _____

2. Do you plan to expand that number?

   (____) Yes

   (____) No

3. Do you turn away any persons applying for a basic Emergency Medical Technician position?

   (____) Yes

   (____) No

4. How many applicants do you turn away per year? _____

5. Is there a sufficient number of qualified applicants for basic Emergency Medical Technician positions?

   (____) Yes

   (____) No

6. How many paramedics do you presently employ? _____

7. Is there a sufficient number of qualified applicants for paramedic positions?

   (____) Yes

   (____) No

8. What recommendations do you have for institutions which train basic Emergency Medical Technicians and paramedics:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____